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activated

Vol 18 • Issue 3

A TALE OF TWO CAMPS

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION THE SECRET

At the time Paul wrote his letter to the church in Philippi, he was languishing in a Roman prison, yet in his introduction, he describes true happiness not as him being released, but as the Christians there having loving, harmonious relations with one another. Then he goes on to describe how they can do that:

“Make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”¹

Paul isn't saying that we should never consider our own needs. Even Jesus sometimes said no to the needs of the crowds so that He could spend time alone with His Father² or training His twelve closest disciples.³ But Paul means that we need to think about others and their needs and interests rather than just focus on ourselves.

We can draw strength to do that from our relationship with Jesus Himself. Whatever we do, we do for Him.⁴ If He is the cornerstone of our actions, if we make Him the center of our attention, then we will be able to build good relationships with God, our family, our coworkers, and others.

It turns out the key to success in life and fruitful relationships is putting Jesus first and being the person that He wants you to be.

I hope the articles in this issue of *Activated* will inspire you and help you to progress along that path.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Philippians 2:2–4 NLT
2. See Mark 1:35–39.
3. See Matthew 16:13; 17:1.
4. See Colossians 3:23.

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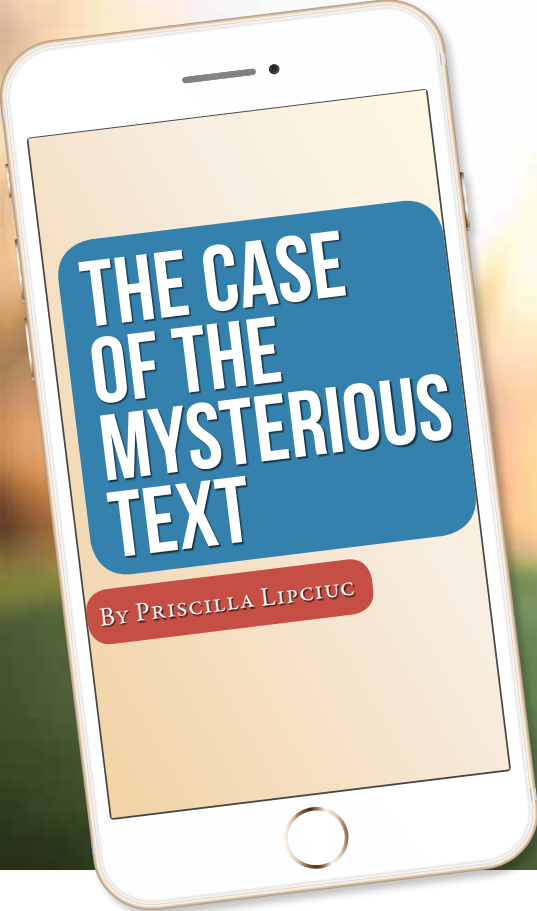
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ONE BUSY DAY, I was trying to get my boys to their computer classes on time when we realized that we couldn't find one of their textbooks nor the house key. More frayed nerves and frantic running around. In the midst of it all, my phone beeped. It was a text message from a number I didn't recognize, and I was taken by surprise by what I read:

"I cannot change your past and I cannot promise you a future, but I can assure you of my love and support in whatever you might endeavor. I hope you have a great day!" No name.

I couldn't help but smile and chuckle. It seemed like one of those "mistakes" Jesus often orchestrates to get my mind off my problems and onto His love for me.

"Thank you for your encouragement," I replied. "However, I should let you know that you've got the wrong number. Please don't feel bad about it—you made my day."

My phone beeped again. "Oh, it *was* actually for you! This is my new number, and I just wanted to make sure you know how I feel about you." It was a friend of mine, the mother of one of my English students. Now I was even more surprised, and as soon as I dropped my boys off, I had to call her back and thank her for her care and thoughtfulness.

The rest of the day followed its normal course, but I definitely had more of a spring in my step. This happy incident got me thinking: Since my husband passed away and I was left to raise our four children

on my own, I've tried to go out of my way to make sure I don't burden anyone. Yet there are people who don't want to intrude but who would be happy to be there for me when I need them. Why didn't I consider for even a moment that this message of appreciation could have been intended for me in the first place? Why was it so hard to believe that the God I know so well would bring special people my way who are more than happy to help me?

I didn't want to let this lesson pass, so I made sure to let it sink in. I think I am better for it.

PRISCILLA LIPCIUC HAS BEEN A MISSIONARY IN EASTERN EUROPE FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS. ■

THE WISE AND UNWISE LEADER

BY DAVID BRANDT BERG, ADAPTED

A GOOD EXECUTIVE IS NOT A BOSS—he is a servant! Jesus wasn't just trying to teach His disciples humility when He said, "Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant."¹ A good executive simply is not a dictator. He listens to his employees. When the top people don't communicate with those under them, then of course they don't understand them or their problems. When that happens, they're headed for trouble!

Leaders at any level should listen to those they lead. Leaders are responsible to make the final decision, but being a leader does

not mean that you have all the ideas and do all the thinking and all the consulting just within yourself. A good executive will listen to others.

When it comes to plans, goals, motivation, and other overall aspects of the work, the leaders are supposed to be skilled or they shouldn't be the leaders. But when it comes to practical matters, leaders ought to listen to others who may know more about it than they do. A good leader will listen to his workers' suggestions, discuss, agree with them on a course of action, and then leave them alone to carry out the work, just monitoring the progress. The executive's

job is really mostly to keep things moving, while others recommend, initiate, and by all means carry out the various actions.

Nearly every CEO or president is surrounded by counselors that advise him on what to do. Did you know that even God works that way? He calls in His chief counselors and angels and asks them, "What do you think we should do about this?" He listens to their suggestions and then has the wisdom to know who is right.² And God not only listens to His heavenly counselors and angels, but don't forget, He even listens to *us* when we pray.

1. Matthew 20:26

2. See 1 Kings 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12.

3. See 1 Corinthians 12:14–17.





The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.—*John Stott (1921–2011)*

Jesus said several times, “Come, follow me.” His was a program of “do what I do,” rather than “do what I say.” His innate brilliance would have permitted him to put on a dazzling display, but that would have left his followers far behind. He walked and worked with those he was to serve.—*Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985)*

If God Himself won't do all the thinking for us, then who are we to try to make all the decisions, do all the thinking, give all the instructions, and carry them all out besides? A leader just can't operate alone!

Only a novice, only a brand-new, not-yet-dry-behind-the-ears junior executive tries to run everything and tell everybody what to do. Any smart executive is going to pump people power. He is not going to try to be the pump, or the pump handle, or the water, or the bucket. Instead, he's going to be the guiding hand that takes hold of the handle and pumps to create a lively discussion so he

and all concerned can benefit from others' ideas and experience.

A wise leader will try to keep others happy, because people do a better job when they are happy and doing work they like to do and want to do. If you're going to have an effective team, the members need to work together, listen to each other, counsel together, decide together, and then follow through together.

As in the human body, you can't say that you have no need of even one little member. You need every fingernail, every cell, as well as every organ and every limb.³ Everybody is important, from the

most insignificant to the seemingly most important. Everyone has their job, everyone is needed, and all must work together in harmony and cooperation.

Talk together, discuss together, counsel together, agree together, decide together, do together, care together, grow together, work together, and enjoy the fruits of your labors together. Then you'll be a wise leader and a good executive.

DAVID BRANDT BERG (1919–1994) WAS THE FOUNDER AND LEADER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■

A Tale of Two Camps

BY MARA HODLER



A FRIEND OF MINE TOLD ME THAT WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG, even though her family was close and they loved one another very much, fairness was always an issue. She said that when her mom brought home a pie or ice cream for dessert, she and her brother fought over who got the bigger piece. The quibbling over dessert portions was so stressful for her mom that she kept a scale near the dining table and literally weighed out each plate of dessert to make sure it was even. That was their family policy for years.

This got me thinking about how easy it is to view life through the “there’s only so much pie” paradigm. If your brother gets a huge piece of pie, there’s less for you, right? Of

course, that’s actually true when it comes to pie, but that’s not the case with most other things in life.

However, there’s a tendency to be a believer either in scarcity or in abundance.

If you’re in Camp Scarcity, you believe that things like love, ideas, opportunities, imagination, finances, and resources are *limited*. Each of those things is like a pie that is being sliced up, and every time someone gets a piece of one, there is less left for you. As you can imagine, there is very little goodwill in Camp Scarcity. People look out for themselves. People aren’t afraid to snatch a piece of pie from someone else, because if you don’t fight for your piece, you might not get any. If you’re lucky enough to snag a piece of pie, you don’t even have time to enjoy it. You

have to scarf it down because someone might be scheming to grab your pie. Having personally spent some time in Camp Scarcity, I can tell you that it’s downright depressing there!

Camp Abundance is a totally different camp. In Camp Abundance, everyone shares the belief that love, ideas, opportunities, imagination, finances, and resources are *limitless*. In this camp, there is a lot of celebration. People enjoy pie all over the place. When someone finds a great pie shop, they recommend it to everyone instead of trying to keep it a secret. Recipes are swapped, improved, and customized. One thing is certain in Camp Abundance: no one is ever going to run out of pie! In fact, most people share the belief that the best pies are yet to be created, yet to be enjoyed, and yet to be shared.

1. www.just1thing.com



Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.
—2 Corinthians 9:6
NIV



Oddly enough, in Camp Scarcity, there actually does seem to be less and less pie. Everyone is worried about the day when the last bite of pie will be eaten. What then? You're on your own, and when it comes to getting your pie, you'd better get it while the getting's good.

But in Camp Abundance, no one fears running out of pie. They're constantly coming up with new ingredients to make pies with, new twists on old classics, new ways to transport pies, and better ways to make more of them. No one worries that one day the pies are simply going to run out.

When I first recognized these two camps, I quickly came to the sorry conclusion that I spent a lot more time in Camp Scarcity than I did in Camp Abundance. I seldom thought

that the best was yet to come. I more often thought that disaster was looming in the near future. When I saw others blessed, I often felt that meant there was less "good" left for me. I was definitely missing out on the party in Camp Abundance!

When I realized that, I packed up and moved camps. I found Camp Abundance to be very welcoming. They definitely had a "the more the merrier" take on things. I started believing that the best was yet to come—for me, for my friends, and for everyone around me. All of a sudden, I had a lot to share. I wasn't running out of ideas, finances, resources, opportunities, or love. It was easy to be generous when I knew that there was no need to hoard. It was easy to celebrate others' wins, because I saw there were plenty of

wins to go around. Moving to Camp Abundance was a great decision!

Would you rather join a camp where you're always on the brink of famine, with dwindling love, ideas, finances, resources, and opportunities? Or a camp where the greatest opportunity, best ideas, richest resources, and deepest love is yet to come, with enough to go around for everyone? Each of us has the power to decide which camp we want to live in.

MARA HODLER IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO THE FAR EAST AND EAST AFRICA. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES IN TEXAS WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN AND RUNS A SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING,¹ A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■

WHEN YOUR SON IS CAUGHT SLEEPING



BY JEWEL ROQUE

ON THE WAY HOME AFTER AN EVENING OUTING WITH SOME FRIENDS, I asked my youngest if he had a good time.

“Sort of,” he answered. “But the kids on the playground were teasing me.”

“About what?” I asked. He sometimes reacts strongly to comments, so I assumed it wasn’t a big deal.

“Eric said he saw a picture of me sleeping while doing homework, and then Leslie said she saw it too, and all the kids started laughing.”

I didn’t know how to respond. I had posted a photo on Facebook

of my son sleeping at his desk, his homework beside him. I had thought it was cute. My son puts his all into his activities, but when he’s tired, he’s tired. And he sleeps.

It runs in my family. My siblings and I know that once we reach a certain point of fatigue, we can’t push past it. Sleep is the only solution. My son has somehow learned that early. When he’s tired, even if it’s when we’re about to sing happy birthday at a party or when he’s supposed to be finishing up his homework, he will sleep.

My husband and I understand that and work around it. Our son’s

1. Matthew 19:14 CEB

Somehow, you need to cling to your optimism. Always look for the silver lining. Always look for the best in people. Try to see things through the eyes of a child. See the wonder in the simplest things. Never stop dreaming. Believe anything is possible.—*Richie Sambora (b. 1959)*

—|—•—|—|—
If I had my child to raise all over again, I'd finger paint more, and point the finger less. I'd do less correcting, and more connecting. I'd take my eyes off my watch, and watch with my eyes. I would care to know less, and know to care more. I'd take more hikes and fly more kites. I'd stop playing serious, and seriously play. I'd run through more fields, and gaze at more stars. I'd do more hugging, and less tugging. I would be firm less often, and affirm much more. I'd build self-esteem first, and the house later. I'd teach less about the love of power, and more about the power of love.—*Diana Loomans*

teachers, for the most part, have also been understanding that at times he might fall asleep at his desk. I try to get him to bed on time when he'll have an early morning or a long day.

Parents and teachers generally understand these things. Other kids often don't.

When I posted the photo, I didn't think about the possibility of parents showing their kids the "cute" post, which in the mind of a child might not be "cute" but "silly" or "funny" or "embarrassing." Material to tease with.

Something I had done unthinkingly caused my son hurt. It cast him in a negative light in the minds of his friends. They probably forgot about it a minute later, and they were all playing again. But that moment, I had to admit to my boy that it wasn't their fault; it was mine.

I pulled up the Facebook photo and showed it to my son, saying, "I

posted this photo of you the other day. I didn't think anyone would tease you about it." Then I promised, "I won't post anything of you unless I ask you first." I already have that agreement with other members of my immediate family, but I didn't think it would matter to my youngest. I was wrong.

It's strange I would make a mistake like that. Thinking back to my own childhood, my strongest emotions resulted from teasing. I can remember half a dozen separate occasions, before the age of five, where I was brought to tears by teasing. Painful moments tend to remain in the mind and the heart long after the echo of the actual words fade.

How often do my own words or side comments have the same effect as those children on the playground? When I'm trying to focus on work, and after one too many interruptions, snap at the kids, telling them to leave

me alone so I can get something done. Or when they're arguing and I can't stand the contention, so I tell them I don't care who said what and whose fault it is—I just want peace.

After careful reflection, I vowed to see every moment of life through the eyes of my child. That's not a promise I can make, nor one I can keep, but it is something I can *try*. Not a once-and-for-all decision, but a moment-by-moment choice. To slow down. To think. To pray. To love.

To remember the words of a loving Christ who took time for the children. "Allow the children to come to me," Jesus said. "Don't forbid them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children."¹

JEWEL ROQUE LIVED IN INDIA FOR 12 YEARS AS A MISSIONARY. NOW IN CALIFORNIA, SHE WORKS AS A FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR. ■

BUILDING GOOD WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

BY ROSANE PEREIRA



I HAVE A NEIGHBOR WHO IS A VERY GOOD HANDYMAN. A while ago, he did some work for us in the house but seemed to be very grouchy and out of sorts. When I tried to help or give a suggestion, he got frustrated and snapped back.

When the job was finished, I was quite relieved not to see him for a while. But then Christmas came around, and I invited him to spend it with us, since his family lived far away. I was quite pleased with myself for what I thought was repaying his rudeness with kindness. On Christmas night, he seemed happy and didn't seem to remember our run-in. Then a few days later, I saw him again, and he said, "You've taught me a lesson." *Aha!* I thought, but instead of apologizing, he said:

1. See 1 Corinthians 13:8.

"You taught me I should value myself more, like you valued me!"

Later, I prayed about the situation, and Jesus showed me that my motivation had not been right, being kind to teach my neighbor a lesson. Then I realized that whatever my intentions had been, God had used them for good. Our neighbor *is* valuable and *should* feel loved and appreciated.

I read that in Japanese philosophy, there are two secrets to enjoying life and improving relationships with relatives or at the workplace.

The first is, be thankful for everything that happens, whether good or bad. Focus on the good to create good memories that you can keep forever. You can even bring God into the situation by praising Him.

The second is, when in conflict with someone, find something praiseworthy about him or her. Keep

doing this and avoid criticalness, and the situation will start improving day by day.

After this, I began complimenting my neighbor every time I saw him or asked for his help again around the house, which happened often. I started to do the same with everybody else I came in contact with, and to my amazement, it really worked.

Let's try to find out what others are going through, to walk a mile in their shoes before passing judgment, and let's try to focus on their good traits! How much better life would be if we would seek to understand one another better! Gentleness begets gentleness, and love never fails!¹

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■



Learning from the Hurt

BY ANNA PERLINI

IT'S MY 20TH YEAR LIVING AND WORKING IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA. I also lived here earlier, right after President Tito died in 1980. His pictures were still hanging everywhere, and though the country was going through a challenging economic crisis, it seemed like nobody questioned Yugoslav unity. Having lived here both “before” and “after,” it’s still a puzzle how a succession of particularly brutal and bloody civil wars eventually led to the formation of seven different countries.

But I’ve found out that many of the people who lived through it also have a hard time making sense of it. It’s as if they lived through a bad dream, a nightmare of hatred and pain.

I’ve often heard comments along the lines of “We can’t figure out what

happened and how we could find ourselves the worst enemies with people who were our neighbors or even relatives.”

Thankfully, although not everyone has forgiven and forgotten, I believe they would think twice or more before getting into another war. They paid the price, and in many ways, are still paying it.

Over the years, *Per un Mondo Migliore* has helped to build bridges of reconciliation, and through this process, I was also helped. I have been privileged to have a peek into the complex matter of war versus peace.

I saw the insanity of war and the hurt and scars it leaves for decades.

I touched the pain of division.

I was convinced once more of the necessity and beauty of unity: what a priceless thing it is, how much power it gives, and what a sad state we fall into when we don’t appreciate it and eventually lose it.

I learned how small things, if not addressed, can become big issues.

I realized the danger of getting too familiar with our blessings, the good things we have, taking them for granted, and eventually being too willing to trade them for some fake promise.

I witnessed the healing forgiveness can bring and the importance of faith and trust versus despair.

I was amazed at the courage, bravery, and unselfishness some people can show in extreme circumstances.

I was reminded of the quote attributed to Mother Teresa: “What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.” If there is no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to one another.

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE,¹ A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■

1. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>



THE MOST UNLIKELY TO SUCCEED

BY SCOTT MACGREGOR

“**DISCIPLE MAKING:** Training Leaders to Make Disciples,”¹ cites an imaginary report to Jesus from the Jordan Management Consultant firm in Jerusalem, detailing its findings on the twelve men He had submitted for evaluation.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. ...

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in the background, education, and

vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. ... We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John ... place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus definitely have radical leanings and they both registered high on the manic depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high

places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man.

Isn't that just about right? I thought ironically, and then it occurred to me that a similar appraisal could have been made of a number of other Bible characters:

Look at the guy who was supposed to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land! Moses was raised in the royal household with all the advantages that money and education could buy, but then he tossed it all down the drain, became a fugitive, and ended up as a shepherd in the desert, where he resided until he was 80—an obvious has-been.

Then there's David, the youngest brother in a large family—which in itself isn't a great start. Even after being tipped by the prophet Samuel as Israel's next king, he went right

1. © 1994 by Billy Graham Center
Institute of Evangelism

2. See 1 Samuel 16.

3. See 1 Samuel 17.

4. See 1 Samuel 22.

5. See 2 Samuel 3:1.

6. See 2 Samuel 15–18.

7. See 1 Kings 3.

8. See 1 Kings 11.

9. Proverbs 16:3 NIV



back to herding sheep, so it was a bit of an anticlimax.² The next chapter sees him promoted to being a lunch delivery boy and getting caught up in a fight with a fellow who is about 10 feet tall—and heavily armed. David elects to toss rocks at him and lands a lucky one.³ But then he goes off to become an outlaw, heading up the biggest gang in the country⁴ and eventually selling his gang's services as mercenaries to an aggressive neighboring nation. When that stops working out, he starts a civil war in his own country.⁵

Time goes on, and eventually David does become king, but in the end one of his sons deposes him and he has to hare out of the capital until his nephew comes to his rescue.⁶

David's heir, Solomon, readily confesses he doesn't even know how to speak in front of the people he's supposed to rule.⁷ God takes up the slack and gives Solomon the smarts, which helps him rule but doesn't seem to extend to his family life. Solomon

ends up with 1,000 wives and concubines, whom he is so preoccupied with keeping happy that the country starts going downhill.⁸

Imagine what the evaluators mentioned above would make of these characters. Would probably go something like this:

Moses: "Too long in the tooth to be of much use at this stage in his career. He had a lot going for him originally, but he got into criminal activity—severe midlife crisis?—and skipped town. Spent 40 years in his wife's family business but doesn't seem to have shown much leadership ability even there. We recommend someone younger."

David: "Kid with an attitude. Puts more effort into his music than his career. Has already been a gang leader, traitor, and mercenary. We recommend someone less volatile."

Solomon: "Young and inexperienced. Not a good communicator and shows a weakness for wild

living. Likely to overspend and deplete resources on grandiose building projects. We recommend someone less inclined to vanity projects and with better self-control."

So there you have it! The apostles weren't alone in being unlikely to succeed. Of course, all the apostles with the exception of Judas succeeded wildly, whereas the managerial consultants' favorite—Judas—turned out to be a bitter disappointment.

So what does this tell us? Well, for one, it's encouraging to know that those who will end up the greatest successes are not necessarily the ones you might think. And for those of us who want to find success in our own ventures, God's Word gives us the secret: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans."⁹

SCOTT MACGREGOR IS AN AUTHOR AND COMMENTATOR AND LIVES IN CANADA. ■



BEING A GOOD LISTENER

SHANNON SHAYLER AND KEITH PHILLIPS, ADAPTED

GOOD LISTENING TAKES EFFORT. Notice the traits of the people whom you enjoy talking to, the good listeners. They show their interest with their eyes, posture, and the ways they react. It's a sort of indescribable mood that says, *I enjoy listening to you. You're important to me.* A calmness and patience about them tells you, *Take your time. I have nothing more vital to do at the moment than to hear what you have to say.*

Listening is one way to better fulfill the “law of Christ,” which the Bible sums up as “loving your neighbor as yourself.”¹ By listening to others in order to understand them, we are doing God’s work with a form of God’s love.

Take a lesson from Jesus. When you take your problems to Him

1. Galatians 5:14; Matthew 22:37–39

in prayer, does He just listen for a moment and then interrupt? Rarely. He’s always there, always available, and always ready to hear you out—to listen to your side of the story. He gets down on your level. He listens carefully to your words, but He also hears the muffled cries of your heart. You know He understands.

Jesus looks at your motives, not at whatever mistakes or messes you may have made. He’s never harsh or condemning. He always holds out mercy and hope and forgiveness. No matter how far you’ve strayed, He never stops loving you.

Listening—really listening—conveys love. It conveys not only your love, but also the Lord’s love for the person, which is unconditional, forever, and perfect in every way. Let others see Jesus in you by trying to be as loving a listener as He is, and you

won’t have a hard time winning their hearts to Him.

Listening also has this important side effect: Once you’ve shown yourself to be a good listener, others are more likely to be more interested in and receptive to what you have to say when it’s your turn to talk. They’ll be less defensive and more open to new ideas and views, and they will be more understanding themselves.

Listening is a talent that can be cultivated. It begins with a sincere desire to understand others in order to better love and help them. Ask Jesus for the gift of empathy, and then ask Him to help you learn to put it to good use helping others and loving them into His heavenly kingdom.

SHANNON SHAYLER AND KEITH PHILLIPS, *ONE HEART AT A TIME* (AURORA PRODUCTION, 2010), ADAPTED. ■



TALKING vs LISTENING

BY IRIS RICHARD

THE SMALL CAFETERIA AT OUR WORKPLACE WAS ABUZZ WITH CHATTER. Colleagues sat in groups and the room was humming with conversation. That morning I felt I had little to contribute and opted to sit alone. Staring out the window, I was lost in troubled contemplation of recent loss, rough edges in my working relationships, and a nagging health issue, and I wondered when I would finally reach the proverbial end of the tunnel where the sun shines again.

As I sipped my latte, I glanced around the room noticing that everyone seemed to have a story to tell. It seemed that everyone enjoyed saying their piece, but fewer were involved in active *listening*. I thought I could really use a friend with good listening

skills who could help me untangle my troubled thoughts. That's when an idea started to form in my mind. Instead of waiting for that special friend, perhaps I should try to be one to others, and since we had recently started a new year, I could even make "better listening" a late New Year's resolution.

My new focus on listening skills prompted me to also take a closer look into how I listened to God. Of course, I realized there was a need for improvement in this area as well and that I needed to develop a keener ear to catch heavenly instruction. If I were really being honest with myself, I'd say that lately my prayer life had been a whole lot of talking and only a little bit of listening.

There is so much to be learned about this skill, but the first step is deciding to be the listener for others that I would want them to be for me. Having taken the first few baby steps,

I already notice that my relationships with coworkers and friends have improved.

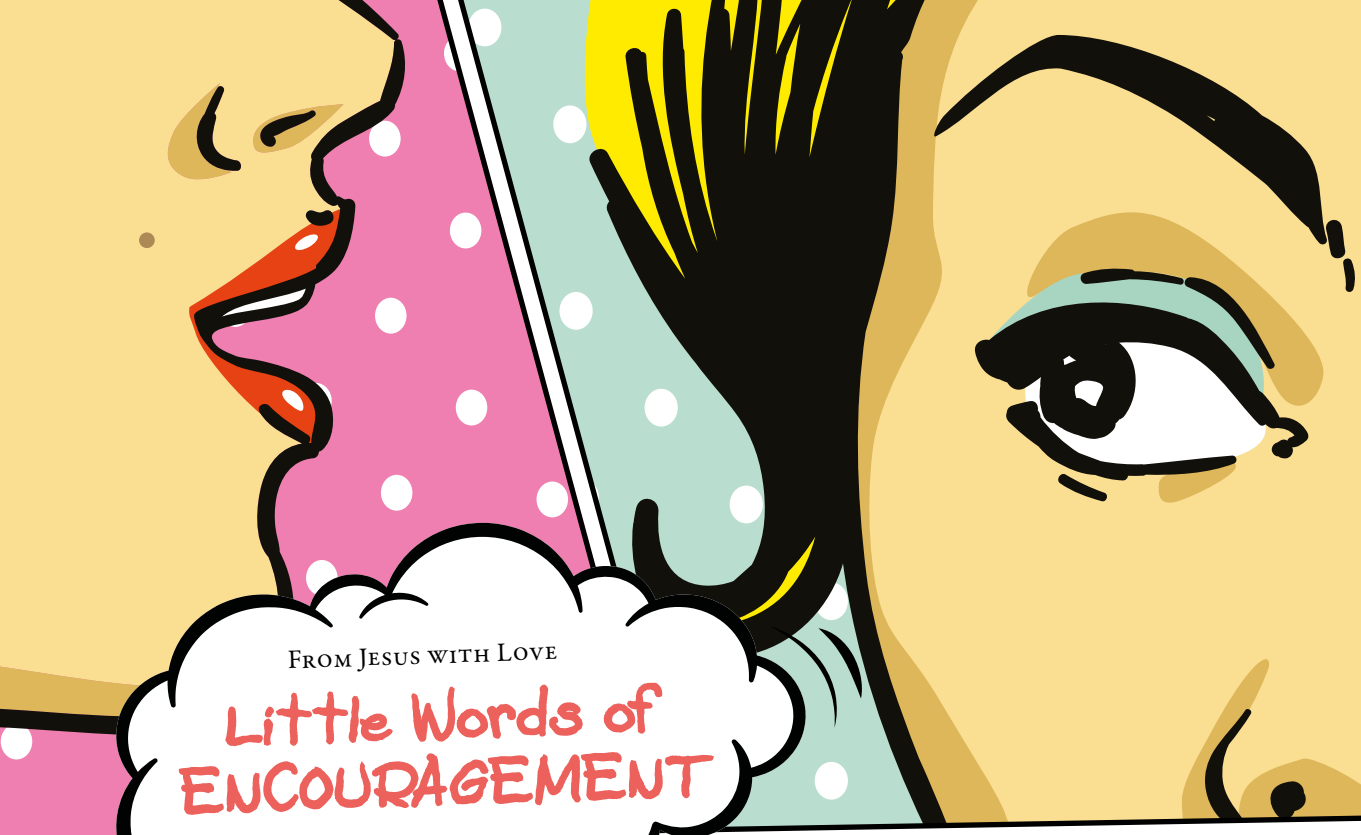
And by the way, God did lead me to my own personal "good listener" whose undivided attention helped me untangle my thoughts and feel that someone understands. "Give, and it will be given to you."¹

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Dear Jesus, in Revelation 3:20 You said: "Listen! I am standing and knocking at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in."² I hear You and want You in my life. Please come in and give me the free gift of Your presence forever.

1. Luke 6:38
2. CEV



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Little Words of ENCOURAGEMENT

I teach you how to have love through My own example. For every great miracle I do for you and all those who love Me, I do countless tiny things that you may barely notice. Those steady demonstrations of My care, My unconditional love, My touches of hope, strength, mercy, and forgiveness, day in and day out, continually manifest My love for you. This multitude of little things that I do for you increases your peace and faith. These things nurture the conviction in your heart that I am real and active in your life, and that I will be forever.

In the same way, you demonstrate that you are My disciple by the love that you show to others. How do you show it? By being a conduit for My love and encouragement day in and day out to those I bring across your path.

When you are willing to lift the hearts of others, you are continuing the work I did on earth. I saw importance in what humankind often counted of little value or worth. I held and lifted up those considered the least in the society of My day, and My love transformed small efforts or tokens of faith into miracles that still reverberate in the hearts of mankind. That tiny refrain of hope, thankfulness, and encouragement that you place in the heart of another will blend in harmony with My Spirit in them, creating a symphony of joy that will spread to the hearts of many others.